

MADONNA of THE AMERICAS



Madonna of the Americas by Don Hildebrando Garza, O.S.B., Mexico City, is a reprint from *Sponsa Regis*, May, 1954.

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MADONNA OF THE AMERICAS

WE know of but one Madonna not wrought by earthly craft. Among the world-famous Madonnas of the Renaissance — Raphael's, Michelangelo's, and Murillo's — one reigns supreme both as to beauty and artistic style. This picture, Our Lady of Guadalupe, given us by Our Lady herself in a direct and miraculous manner, stands out in a remarkable way as a sign of her special predilection for America.

Unfortunately, few people realize that Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Madonna, not of Mexico alone, but of the Americas. When she appeared, four hundred years ago, there was neither Mexico nor the United States nor Canada, nor any other nation of present name in the Western Hemisphere, but simply two continents united into one. "Happy America! Favored Americans! America beloved by Mary! O Americans, whence was this to you, that the Mother of your Lord should come to you?" This is the way in which preachers and poets, as well as canonists and historians of the 17th and 18th centuries, spoke. Unfortunately for the Americas, the partitioning into individual nations has obscured the continentality of Our Lady's visit. Thus, while Mary is still honored under this title (Guadalupe) with enthusiastic reverence in Mexico itself, her significance to America as a whole has been widely overlooked.

Holy Mary "De Guadalupe"

Besides bearing in mind that the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe is the only one known to have been given to us by Our Lady herself, it is of great importance to remember also that Our Lady of Guadalupe is not so called from the *place* at which she appeared (Tepeyac), as was the case at Fatima in Portugal or Lourdes in France, but because she herself gave us this name. The name she gave is the Indian "Tecoatlaxopeuh", transliterated by the Spanish speaking people as "de Guadalupe". This Indian name is not meaningless; translated, it means "the one who crushed the serpent". Hence Mary has given these

continents of ours the name by which she wishes to be honored here. And if she is the one who crushed the serpent, then that means the Immaculate Conception — a remarkable coincidence, since in 1846 the Baltimore Council chose the Immaculate Conception as Patroness of the United States.

Her Apparitions

The first written tradition furnishes us with a full story of the apparitions, of which the following is only a brief account. Early on the morning of Saturday, December 9, 1531, a poor Indian peasant, called Juan Diego, simple and humble, one of those recently converted to the Faith, was on his way from his native village to Mass and instruction at one of the Franciscan mission churches in the city of Mexico. Dawn was breaking as he passed by the hill called Tepeyac, just three miles north of the city. Suddenly there burst forth a beautiful song as of thousands of birds singing. For an instant it ceased, and the mountains echoed a response. Looking up to the crest of the hill, he saw a white shining cloud, having around it a rainbow whose colors were formed by rays of dazzling light that blazed from the midst of the cloud.

Then it was very quiet, and he heard a women's voice calling his name. Strangely overjoyed rather than frightened, he climbed up the hill to see who was calling him. The voice came from the brightness of the cloud and bade him draw nearer. Then he saw her — a most beautiful Lady (just as she was to look later in the miraculous picture).

“Juanito, Juan Dieguito, where are you going?”

“My Lady and Mistress, I am going to Mexico to hear Mass and the divine things which the ministers of God teach us.”

“Know, my son, my little one, that I am the ever Virgin, Holy Mary, Mother of the true God, who is the Author of life, the Creator of all things, the Lord of heaven and earth, present everywhere. It is my wish that a church be erected to me in this place. Here I will show myself as a loving Mother to you and to all those born in these lands, and to all those who love me

and trust in me, for I am your loving Mother. Go to the palace of the Bishop and tell him what you have heard and seen. Tell him also of the church I ask for.”

When the Bishop heard Juan Diego, he treated him kindly, though without believing him. Dismissing the Indian, the Bishop promised to discuss the matter with him again after a few days.

The Second Appearance

The evening of the same day, Juan Diego, confused and discouraged, came back looking for Our Lady and found her waiting for him. He suggested to her that she send a more respectable person, who would be more easily believed. Our Lady answered that she had many messengers and servants whom she could send, but it was her desire that he should carry her message. And so she asked him to go and see the Bishop again and tell him it was the Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God, who sent him.

Sunday the tenth, after hearing Mass and receiving instruction, Juan went to the Bishop's house. The Bishop questioned him again and again, and finally told him he would have to bring a sign. Although Juan Diego confidently asked him what kind of sign he wanted, the Bishop would not specify any particular one. He sent the Indian away and commanded two of his servants to follow him. Shortly afterwards, to the confusion of the Bishop's men, they lost sight of Juan Diego. Not being able to find him, they returned to the Bishop and said that they thought the Indian must be a witch or an imposter, because he had disappeared before their very eyes.

Juan Receives "The Sign"

Juan Diego, in the meantime, saw Our Lady again and, after she had thanked him for what he had done, she told him to come back on the following day for the sign.

At dawn, December 12, Juan Diego set out to call a priest for his dying uncle, Juan Bernardino. Fearing that Our Lady would detain him and cause him to be late, he decided to take another road. To his surprise, he saw her descending the hill

to meet him. He explained to Our Lady about his uncle, that he was on his way now for a priest and had intended to come back immediately afterwards for the sign. The day before, on the 11th of December, he had not been able to go to her at all because he was taking care of his uncle.

Our Lady calmed his anguish. "Listen, my little son. There is nothing which you need fear. Do not be anxious about this illness, nor about any other illness or affliction. Am I not here beside you, your merciful Mother? Am I not your hope and salvation? Of what more do you have need? As to the illness of your uncle, he will not die from it. Be assured that he is already cured."

Roses In Wintertime

Juan Diego then asked Our Lady for the sign. She directed him to climb up the hill to the place where he had first seen her. There he was to gather and bring down to her an armful of roses. Juan, in spite of the winter weather and the barrenness of the place, believed Our Lady. Going up he found at the summit fragrant Castilian roses covered with dew. He cut as many as he could and brought them down to Our Lady. With her own hands she arranged them in his tilma (cloak). "Here is the sign I promised in order to show my will to the Bishop. Go and see him and show the roses to no one but him. Tell him of the church I wish here. You are my ambassador, and I have confidence in your faithfulness."

The Miraculous Image

At the Bishop's house Juan Diego waited for a long time to see the Bishop. The servants noticed that he had something in his tilma and was shielding it carefully from sight. Though Juan Diego resisted, they managed to pull aside one corner of the tilma, and saw the roses. They reached for them several times, but their hands only touched what seemed to be painted or woven into the tilma. The amazed servants told the Bishop at once of this strange happening. When the Bishop called him in, Juan

Diego related what Our Lady had told him and then, unfolding his tilma, he allowed the roses to spill out. The Bishop's eyes were fixed on the tilma, where there was now imprinted the image of the most Holy Mary of Guadalupe, as Juan Diego had described her.

On the same day, December 12, Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego's dying uncle, Juan Bernardino. She told him that she had come to cure him. She also said that it was her wish that a church be erected at the foot of the hill of Tepeyac. Here her image, which Juan Diego was carrying to the Bishop, was to be venerated and be called "Holy Mary, ever Virgin, of Guadalupe."

Our Lady's image has been acclaimed by artists of world renown. At the head of a commission of seven artists, who examined the image in 1751, Miguel Cabrera declared:

"The plan of this holy Picture is so singular, so perfectly accomplished, and so manifestly marvelous, that whoever has any knowledge of the art of painting, on seeing it at once declares it a miraculous accomplishment. . . . Its most beautiful grace of symmetry is a marvel that amazes those who are at all acquainted with sketching. Every line and turn of it is so clearly a miracle, that there actually shines forth in the admirable work the supreme power of its author."

In the Brief of Pope Benedict XIV (1754) we find these remarkable words:

"In it there is nothing which is not wonderful: a Picture from flowers gathered in mid-winter on a soil entirely sterile and fit to bear only thorns; on a cloth so thin that through it, as a lattice, the temple lay easily open to the eyes: and that after two centuries the niter of the neighboring lake, which erodes silver, gold, and brass, has not in the least injured its supreme beauty (*summam pulchritudinem*), nor its most vivid colors."

The Immaculate Virgin Of Guadalupe

That she is the Immaculate Conception, many writers and preachers are agreed. Her very picture represents this Mystery. Besides, the name (*Tecoatlaxopeuh*) which she gave signifies Immaculate Conception. If she does not have the serpent under her feet, as usually portrayed, it is because this effect is included in her very title. And instead of the serpent, there is an angel,

which means even more: for she is not only the one who had total enmity with the serpent, but also was born higher than the angels, in the splendor of grace and glory.

Exactly a century before the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed, Benedict XIV did not hesitate to call her, "Blessed Mary, Virgin Immaculate of Guadalupe."

In 1846 the Baltimore Fathers declared the Immaculate Conception patroness of the United States. This was just a century after Mexico had obtained the patronage of the Immaculate Virgin of Guadalupe. And could it be otherwise, since these lands already belonged to Mary! God had sent her long before, and thus she had taken possession of the Americas.

Liturgy

In Rome, during the celebration in 1933 of the fourth centennial of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe, five hundred bishops requested the Holy See to extend the Mass and Office to the Universal Church. This petition was not granted. Two years later, however, the Philippine Islands obtained from the Holy See the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It seems that the Virgin of Guadalupe did not want her Mass extended to the Universal Church, because she wants first to be known, and then loved and venerated.

The texts of her Mass and Office for December 12 adapt Scripture to the occasion of her coming. On reading her Mass, thoughts instinctively come to one's mind of the Guadalupan miracle. The Gospel — the Visitation to Mary's cousin and to the unborn Baptist — reminds us of the visit at the hill of Tepeyac ("into the hill country", the Gospel says) to the yet unborn Church in the New World. The Gradual describes the first and last apparition, as well as the fruits of her visit: "Who is she," it asks, "who comes up like the rising morn, fair as the moon, brilliant as the sun? As the rainbow, when it glistens amidst clouds of glory, and as the rose blossoms in the time of spring. . . ." The Alleluia verse continues: "The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come, Alleluia." Who will not think

of the winter roses and the apparitions of Mary of Guadalupe on reading these verses from the Cantic of Canticles? And still more explicitly, the Offertory verse (2 Par. 7), which is repeated as the *Magnificat* antiphon in Vespers, easily recalls to our minds Our Lady's visit to America: "I have chosen and have sanctified *this place*, that *my name* may be there, and *my eyes* and *my heart* may remain forever."

The Communion verse is from Psalm 147: "Non fecit taliter omni nationi," ("He hath not done in like manner to every nation"), which the great Pontiff, Benedict XIV, applied to Mary in her apparitions in the New World. He personally composed the Collect for Our Lady of Guadalupe's Mass and Office, which he granted two centuries ago, 1754, in his Brief, "*Non est Equidem*".

The Holy See And Guadalupe

No less than twenty-five Popes have directly or indirectly approved the apparitions of Holy Mary of Guadalupe. Six of these testimonies are outstanding.

Benedict XIV (1740-1758) granted the patronage of the Immaculate Virgin of Guadalupe to Mexico. Eyewitnesses testified that he wept, when he heard the story of her apparitions and saw a replica of the miraculous Picture. It was then that, falling on his knees, he exclaimed, "Non fecit taliter omni nationi," which has since been the distinctive motto of the Madonna of the Americas.

Leo XIII (1878-1903) is the Pope of the Guadalupan Coronation. It was October 12, 1895, with his express authorization, that the coronation of the original image took place at Tepeyac. For this occasion the Office of the feast had been revised by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, with the special sanction of Pope Leo XIII. Three years later, when the same Pontiff crowned Our Lady of Guadalupe for Bergamo, Italy, he remarked, that "a more beautiful image than this we have never been able to admire, and her amiability invites us to consider how beautiful Mary must be in heaven."

Blessed Pius X (1903-1914), in the fifth year of his reign,

granted the Canons of the Basilica of Guadalupe the faculty of wearing the same choral vesture which is worn at the Basilica of Our Lady of Loreto. In this Brief he wrote these memorable words: "Among the most famous churches of the Christian world must be mentioned, with all justice and right, the one which exists in Mexico in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe." Two years later he declared as Patroness of Latin America, "the most Holy Virgin Mary in her title of Guadalupe."

Benedict XV (1914-1922) crowned an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe for Albino, Italy, in 1919. A few months later, on December 12 of the same year, he made this notable pronouncement: "THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE IS THE PROTECTRESS OF THE PONTIFF."

Pius XI (1922-39) attended the ceremony celebrated in the Basilica of the Vatican on December 12, 1933, when a replica of the Virgin of Guadalupe, by a unique and special concession of His Holiness, occupied the "Gloria" of Bernini. This is the first image of Mary which has ever been placed here, where only the symbol of the Blessed Trinity or the image of those to be beatified is honored.

In 1945 His Holiness Pope Pius XII designated as his Legate *a Latere* His Excellency Rodrigo Cardinal Villeneuve of Quebec to attend the Guadalupan solemnities on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her Coronation. It is especially since this time of Our Lady of Guadalupe's second coronation, when she received an imperial crown, that she has been known as Empress of America. The Holy Father also sent a radio message to Mexico and America, placing the whole Western Hemisphere under her care:

"... On the tilma of poor Juan Diego was painted with brushes not of this world a most sweet Picture, which the corrosive work of centuries was most wondrously to respect. The amiable Maiden asked for a See from which she might 'show and give all her love and compassion, help and protection... to all the inhabitants of that land and to all others who would invoke her and trust in her.' Since that historical moment the total evangelization has been accomplished.

Furthermore, a banner was hoisted and a fortress has been erected against which the fury of all the storms would break. One of the fundamental pillars of the Faith in Mexico and in all America was thus firmly established.

“Hail, O Virgin of Guadalupe! We, to whom the admirable disposition of Divine Providence, not taking notice of Our unworthiness, has entrusted the sacred treasure of the divine wisdom on earth for the salvation of the souls of all, place once more the crown upon your brow. May you keep forever under your powerful patronage the purity and integrity of our holy Faith, both in Mexico and on the entire American continent. For We know and are certain that as long as you are acknowledged as Queen and Mother, America and Mexico are safe.”

Art and Devotion

Sister Johanna, O.S.B., remarks, that “the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe shows how she prefers to be painted” (cf. *Sponsa Regis*, Oct., 1953). Knowing the difficulty we have in forming a fitting image of her in our minds when we pray to her, she came to our aid, giving us this miraculous Picture. Thus Our Lady fosters our devotion with a work of sacred art which surely is not able to be equalled by human hands. Its features, kept before the eyes and transferred to the mind, attract to noble purity of character and life. With its heavenly modesty and delicacy, it is, as it were, a bulwark for us against aggressive worldliness and materialism. It can even be the instrument for mutual understanding among peoples in this hemisphere.

Brothers through Mary

A Pan-American Union may be helpful in political and economic spheres, but it cannot succeed until there is the foundation of a spiritual and religious union. Such a bond is realized by acknowledging that we are all sons and daughters of Mary. And the Madonna of the Americas has made this possible. Her picture causes us to remember the words she spoke to Juan Diego, that she is a loving Mother to all those born in these lands, America. Nor does she exclude any of her children in other parts of the world, for she also said, “And to all those who love and call upon me.” SALVE, SPES AMERICAÆ!

